

October 10, 2023

The Honorable Maria Cantwell,  
Chairwoman,  
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce,  
Science, and Transportation  
254 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz,  
Ranking Member,  
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce,  
Science, and Transportation  
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Chairwoman,  
U.S. House Committee on Energy & Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Ranking Member, U.S. House  
Committee on Energy & Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs Cantwell and McMorris Rodgers, and Ranking Members Cruz and Pallone;

As school resumes across the U.S., America's farming and ranching families are proud to be producing food to put on our children's cafeteria tables. However, we are concerned that rising imports are undercutting U.S. producers and jeopardizing national security.

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to request your immediate attention to the rise in agricultural products being produced under inferior standards. Domestic manufacturers and producers simply cannot compete with the low cost of production for certain imported agricultural products, which do not have to meet the same environmental, consumer safety, and labor standards.

For example, according to the Washington-Oregon Canning Pear Association, China can afford to deliver its product at \$3 to \$4 per box less than domestic producers. As such, Chinese canned food exports to the U.S. jumped 22 percent to \$6.9 billion in value.

That difference in price often means that government officials opt for the more cost-efficient, imported product when filling contracts for federal or state procurement of consumer goods. Canned foods are a popular item in the National School Lunch Program, state disaster aid programs, and other public service institutions due to their convenience and storability. Accordingly, the value of imports from foreign sources of canned fruits and vegetables increased 44% from 2018 to 2022. In that same period, the value of canned meat imports also increased over 400%.

The U.S. government spends over \$600 billion each year in procurement needs and is the single largest purchaser of consumer goods worldwide. "Buy American" requirements only necessitates that a canned food item consists of at least 51 percent domestic product. Further, waivers can be obtained if "domestic preference would be inconsistent with the public interest." There is absolutely no excuse for U.S. taxpayer dollars to support foreign production and manufacturing.

Cost may be the only advantage Chinese canned foods have over American-produced foods, but that price is paid in other ways.

The use of forced labor to produce imported agricultural products, like Chinese canned goods, well documented by the U.S. Department of State. Even with the passage and implementation of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, concerns remain that Chinese canned goods produced using forced human labor are still making their way into homes, schools, and businesses across the U.S. Or, in Brazil, large ranches hidden in the Amazon rainforest employ impoverished individuals to live and work in horrific conditions for very little or no pay. It is imperative that the U.S. fully investigate these concerns and close the loopholes that allow the illegal shipment of goods produced using forced labor from places like China and Brazil.

In 2022, the [U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission](#) reported that 81 percent of product recalls were traced to imported goods. China had the largest number of product recalls, which affected over 70 million units in the homes of American consumers. One of the [most recent recalls](#) involved salmon products, which were never inspected nor allowed to be imported.

There have been reports that Chinese farmers use untreated and partially treated human wastewater to irrigate crops. This “reclaimed wastewater” leaves heavy metals, antibiotic residues, and other contaminants above the permissible limits in cropland areas, according to a study published in *Science of the Total Environment* in 2022. It’s estimated that up to 65 percent of Chinese canned foods may be sourced from crops irrigated with this water source.

Producers in other foreign countries do not have to uphold the same environmental and production standards as U.S. growers and manufacturers. This is why it is critical that imported agricultural products be labeled accurately and blatantly with their country of origin, adhering to all U.S. trade obligations with the World Trade Organization.

Congress and the Federal government should, and must, prioritize the health of the American public and uphold the livelihoods of U.S. farmers and ranchers by investigating the current regulations and implementing stricter measures governing federal procurement and imports of foreign-produced goods.

Sincerely,

American Agri-Women  
Independent Cattlemen’s Association of  
Texas  
Latino Farmers & Ranchers International,  
Inc.  
New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association  
Pacific Northwest Canned Pear Service  
Rural & Agriculture Council of America

South Carolina Specialty Crop Growers  
Association  
U.S. Cattlemen’s Association  
Washington Asparagus Commission  
Washington Blueberry Commission  
Washington Red Raspberry Commission  
Washington State Fruit Commission